

## Providing Screening and Brief Intervention Services

### “The 5 A’s” for Addressing Substance Use

(Adapted from *Substance Abuse during Pregnancy: Guidelines for Screening*, Washington State Department of Health 2009)

#### ASK

- Screen all pregnant women regarding their substance use. Remember, any use by a pregnant woman is cause for concern. Select a tool designed for pregnant women which focuses on use – not just abuse. Pick a tool you are comfortable with and will use consistently.

#### ADVISE

- Use this opportunity to educate a woman and her partner about the adverse effects of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol, and the benefits of stopping use at any time during pregnancy or postpartum. Inform her about the medical risks she and her baby face if she uses during pregnancy. Let her know that stopping her substance use will always ensure a more positive birth outcome for her baby

#### ASSESS

- Assess her motivation to change her behavior. Many women abstain from drugs and alcohol, especially during pregnancy. If she does not use, acknowledge this wise choice and review the benefits of abstinence from substances. If she uses, assess her motivation to change and tailor your interventions accordingly.

The Stages of Change model is one approach to understanding the steps to changing drug, alcohol and/or tobacco use during pregnancy. For more information about how you can assess an individual’s level of motivation and help motivate them to change certain behaviors see [Stages of Change](#).

- Pre-natal care providers and other providers that serve pregnant women (i.e., home visitors, mental health clinicians) should **continue to screen throughout the pregnancy and into the postpartum period - ideally at each encounter, but at least once per trimester**. Women may deny use yet present with signs and symptoms that suggest they are using. If so, it is wise to re-screen and re-educate the woman on the effects of substance use.

## **ASSIST**

- Depending on a woman's level of motivation, your efforts to assist her will vary. Some women may not understand the risks they are taking and merely need education. Others may be using to cope with stressors and may need to be referred for substance abuse treatment. Although a woman may feel safe enough to acknowledge her use with you, she may not be ready to take the next step of obtaining a comprehensive assessment and treatment and may need encouragement to do so. She may be fearful of treatment, ambivalent about making changes in her life or lack confidence that she can change her behavior. Your support and encouragement can help her seek the services she needs.

## **ARRANGE**

- Learn about resources in your community and how to access them. Maintain a current list of their phone numbers.
- When you suspect a woman has a problem, discuss the benefits of treatment and offer to provide her with a referral to a substance abuse treatment provider or program in her area. If possible, make the appointment while you are with her.
- Explain that an individual's treatment needs vary depending upon how severe her use is, other problems she may have and how much support she has to address these problems. Let her know that, in order to determine the best course of treatment for her, the first step is for her to be assessed by a substance abuse professional. This person will interview her to learn more about her substance use and other problems and any special needs she might have.
- Discuss the different strategies available to stop substance use such as individual counseling, 12-step programs, and other treatment programs. Studies have shown that people who are given choices are more successful in treatment
- Tailor resources according to her needs and health insurance coverage.
- If available, refer her to an outreach or home visiting program that can provide additional support and services.
- If substance abuse treatment or other support is not immediately available, arrange to meet with her weekly or biweekly to provide additional support and encouragement while she waits.
- Maintain communication with her substance abuse treatment provider to monitor her progress.
- Continue to discuss her substance use and efforts to pursue treatment at subsequent visits. Your interest is important.